

August, 2004

This report went to multiple Administration recipients.

Last week, I traveled to the Middle East during the period August 7-14 and visited Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon and Syria.

The goals and objectives of this trip included:

- Examining the progress of reconstruction efforts in Iraq, and the Oil-for-Food Program;
- Discussing peace initiatives with Israeli and Palestinian officials; and
- Discussing, with leaders in Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria US relations with Middle Eastern countries, efforts to reconstruct Iraq, counter terrorism, and stemming the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Iraq

This has been my sixth trip to Iraq in the last 16 months.

In Iraq we met with:

- Prime Minister Allawi, Foreign Minister Zebari, Defense Minister Shalan al-Khuzaei, and other government officials, and both Sunni and Shiite community leaders to discuss security in Iraq, and the new Iraqi security forces being trained to take over the mission of stabilizing Iraq.
- Ambassador Negrepon, General Casey, General Patreaus, and the Commanders of the 1st Cavalry Division, General Chiarelli, and General Conway, of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, and US Soldiers and Marines on the front lines.

People ask why I go to Iraq. As Chairman of the National Security Subcommittee, which oversees the Departments of Defense, State and Homeland Security it is my responsibility to get information first hand, and not rely on the press, or the Administration.

Consistently observing the efforts in Iraq has allowed me to compare how we're doing over time.

- From April to August 2003, we saw a dictator eliminated, lawlessness begin, and a decrease in security and stability. But, I also saw a good deal of progress during August and December 2003, and January 2004.
- During my trips in April and August 2003, I saw progress in some areas and a continuation of the same in other areas.
- My opinion, based on this most recent trip is, despite a problematic security situation, Iraqis are making progress.

Americans, and our Coalition partners should be proud we have helped the Iraqi people overthrow a murderous dictator and are now seeing the fruits of our efforts.

An interim government has been established, and Prime Minister Allawi is in charge.

- Prime Minister Allawi has the strength of his convictions to move the country toward democracy.
- An Interim National Council election has been convened to establish an interim Parliament until elections can be held.
- Other countries have accepted and recognized this new Iraqi government. For example, President Asad from Syria told us he warmly welcomed Prime Minister Allawi.

The United States has stepped back as the controlling power and Iraqis are running the government and beginning to provide for their own security.

Iraqi security forces are being trained and at the same time fighting a war with the insurgents.

- An Iraqi security force is being built from the ground up and the trained forces are now engaged in confronting the insurgents and criminal elements in Iraq.
- The new Iraqi soldiers told us they are willing to fight and die for their country, but the United States should not abandon them in their quest for democracy.

The United States made some mistakes trying to get Iraq up and running, but we are now making up ground. It is still going to be a difficult process, but we should be encouraged because:

What we see reported in the media about Iraq are the car bombings, assassinations, kidnappings and attacks. What we don't see reported is the rebuilding of one school at a time, one water line, one sewer line and the training of one Iraqi security person at a time. This type of information does not sell newspapers, so it goes unreported.

What is happening in Iraq is – and needs to be – an Iraqi revolution. By allowing Iraqis to continue to serve, they have the ownership and sense of control they need to make this an effective transition.

Despite the security situation, progress is being made in Iraq, especially on the political front—Iraqis are building and beginning to learn the difficult democratic process.

Jordan:

In Jordan the Congressional Delegation met with US Embassy officials, the Prime Minister of Jordan and other Jordanian government officials.

Jordan is a Middle East success story because reforms are being instituted—especially in their educational system.

However, democracy will not spring to life overnight in the Middle East—we must be patient.

The Jordanians said the United State made mistakes in Iraq—disbanding the military, total De-Baathification, and focusing almost totally on Shia and not on Sunni elements of Iraqi society.

Some countries in the region are concerned America will be able to turn Iraq into a democracy, consequently destabilizing their dictatorial rule.

The Congressional Delegation also visited the Jordanian International Police Training Center. This is the location where Iraqi police are trained.

- The Delegation received questions from the trainees and spoke to them about the need to bring stability to Iraq. The trainees were told that through their efforts Iraq will become a democracy.

Israel/West Bank

In Israel the Congressional Delegation met with:

- Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel
- Prime Minister Ahmad Quraya (Abu Alla) of the Palestinian Authority
- US Ambassador Kurtzer and other members of the US Embassy.
- Minister of the Knesset Shimon Peres
- Israeli Security Agency
- Israeli Intelligence Officials
- Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu

Additionally the Congressional Delegation toured the barrier that is used to protect Israelis from suicide bombings.

These meetings allowed the Congressional Delegation to gain a better understanding of the difficult issues confronting both Israelis and Palestinians—protect Israelis from terrorist attacks and allow Palestinians freedom of movement within their regions.

While both sides say they are committed to peaceful resolution of the issues, the violence continues—the security situation is not under control in the Palestinian regions, and the Palestinian leadership continues to encounter growing pains.

Lebanon

In Lebanon the Congressional Delegation met with:

- President Emile Lahoud
- Foreign Minister Jean Obeid
- Elie Ferzli, Deputy Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies
- Lebanese business leaders
- The US Ambassador and other US Embassy officials

Lebanon is a country that went through a massive civil war in the 1980s. The United States has lost over 400 of our citizens in that country, including 241 United States Marines.

Hezbollah is a significant force in Lebanon and controls major portions of the country. This organization is supported by Iran and Syria exerts considerable influence over this terrorist organization.

The Lebanese have rebuilt Beirut, and established a stable coalition government. There is still a strong Syrian influence in Lebanon. Syrian troops and intelligence officers in Lebanon are said to influence Lebanese elections.

The delegation expressed the need to have Lebanese elections free from outside influences.

Syria

In Syria the Congressional Delegation met with:

- President Bashar al-Asad
- Foreign Minister Farouk Shaara
- The US Ambassador and other US Embassy officials

- Syrian business leaders

The Asad meeting lasted over 1 hour. President Asad expressed a desire to work with the United States. He is trying to control the Syrian-Iraqi border and has deployed additional troops to into the area. There is a Syrian border outpost every 1-3 kilometers along the 600 kilometer border with Iraq. The Syrians requested equipment such as binoculars and night vision devices to help prevent infiltration of insurgents into Iraq.

Asad believes the disintegration of Iraq affects the entire region. He has accepted the Interim Iraqi Government and met with Prime Minister Allawi.

Asad believes the Syrian Accountability Act is not useful. The Syrians are trying to work with the United States to alleviate concerns listed in the Act.

Syrians stick to their position that Hezbollah is turning into a political organization.

Members on the CODEL:

Representative Christopher Shays (R-CT)
Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security,
Emerging Threats and International Relations

Representative Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD)
Chairman, Subcommittee on Fisheries
Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Representative Mark Kennedy (R-MN)
Committee on Financial Services

Representative Rush Holt (D-NJ)
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

Representative Betty McCollum (D-MN)
Committee on International Relations